

ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU ❖ SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

Sheldon Jackson Museum

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July Native Artist Demonstrators

The Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum continues its Native Artist Demonstrator program through July. The Friends hosts Alaska Native artists to demonstrate and interpret their artwork and culture in the museum each summer. The artists present traditional Alaska Native arts as reflected in the museum collections and exhibits, including wood, ivory and silver carving; drum making; beading; skin sewing; and basket and textile weaving.

The program helps visitors make a modern-day connection to Native art and culture. The demonstrators allow visitors to see that traditional art forms continue to be a part of Native life and culture.

The program works to preserve and encourage “endangered arts” or arts that are being revitalized such as spruce root and cedar bark basketry, willow root basketry, and Raven’s Tail and Chilkat weaving. Beginning artists gain the opportunity to sharpen their artistic and public demonstration skills. Master artists gain the opportunity to share their knowledge with other artists and give their work exposure to a broad audience in a respected state museum. Working in the museum also affords Native artists from all over Alaska the chance to study the Sheldon Jackson Museum’s extraordinary collection, one of Alaska’s most comprehensive collections of ethnographic art and technology.

Roy Levine, a wood carver of Aleut, Russian and Swedish descent, will demonstrate his art through July 13 and again on July 30 through August 3. Most days he will be demonstrating from 9:00 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Levine grew up in Kodiak and came to Sitka to attend Mt. Edgecumbe High School. His major interest is Aleut art, particularly open-crown bentwood hats, baidarkas, and masks. Levine studied with Sitka carvers Raymond Nielson and Louis Menard and is a member of an informal carving group.

“I use cedar, spruce, yellow cedar and alder. I love working with the soft woods. I find it relaxing and very spiritual. While carving I reflect on the artists who walked along a beach, picked up a piece of driftwood and created the beautiful art that is all over the world. I like to teach and share my experience with others,” Levine said.

Returning to the program this summer is well known Tlingit beader and skin sewer Margaret Gross-Hope, who now lives in Sitka. Among the items she sews and beads are octopus bags, tote bags, dance robes, raven dance shirts, moccasins and a variety of other traditional and contemporary apparel. Gross-Hope said she began learning about her art at an early age by watching her grandmother, Mary James of Kake, Alaska, make moccasins. Later, she sewed with her mother, Martha DeWitt of Wrangell, Alaska. Gross-Hope was the director and an instructor at the Indian Cultural Center in Wrangell. She apprenticed with Esther Littlefield, and has also taught beading and button sewing at the Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center. Her work is included in a number of public and private collections. She will be demonstrating the week of July 16-20 from 10:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Longtime Sitka resident Sarah Williams, originally from Fort Yukon in Alaska's Interior, learned her beading craft at an early age by watching her grandparents. She creates a wide range of beaded objects including purses, scissors cases, and traditional baby carrying straps. Her work is seen at bazaars and local art exhibits.

Williams moved to Sitka 30 some years ago to be with her husband and continues her traditional Athabascan artwork. "My people are known worldwide for their beadwork, especially for the style that comes from Fort Yukon," Williams said. Brightly colored floral patterns on a white background is the Fort Yukon beading style. She will demonstrate July 23 through 27 from 9:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

A \$20,000 grant from National Endowment for the Arts awarded to The Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum has been used to support the museum's summer Native Artist Demonstrators Program and to bring Yup'ik scholar Chuna McIntyre to Sitka during Native American Heritage Awareness Month in November 2006. The grant will continue to fund the 2007 program and bring an artist to the museum in November for a lecture. The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts. The support period for the grant is March 2006 through September 2007.

Also supporting the program is Alaska Airlines, Shee Atika Totem Square Inn and donations from individuals.

Please contact the museum for a complete listing of the 2007 Native Artist Demonstrators Program or visit our web site: www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/sjnatedemos.html.

Summer hours are daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$4. Visitors 18 and younger, Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and those with passes are admitted free of charge.

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